



Frequently Asked Questions¹: Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing Proposed Amendments

Background

Q: Why is the City amending the code?

A: In 2021, **E2SHB 1220** was signed by the Governor. This bill eliminated certain zoning barriers related to the provision of emergency housing. Specifically, *cities shall not prohibit transitional housing or permanent supportive housing in any zones in which residential units or hotels are allowed* (35A.21 RCW; 35.21 RCW). While Medina does not allow hotels, residential units (houses) are allowed in every zoning district.

Q: Must the City amend the code?

A: E2SHB 1220 amended the state code. Even if Medina chose not to adopt any amendments, these facilities are allowed in the city right now. At minimum, the City needs to update the use table ([MMC 16.21.030](#)) and add definitions. Although this provision is still new, staff has reviewed what other cities are doing (those that have already adopted something) and have proposed a new code section to provide protection for existing residents while not going beyond the intention of the new law.

Q: What is Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing?

A: Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing pairs subsidized housing with case management and supportive services. These programs are a proven solution to chronic homelessness. It has been shown to help people experiencing chronic homelessness not only achieve long-term housing stability, but also improve their health and well-being. These facilities have helped decrease the number of chronically homeless individuals nationally by eight percent since 2007. They offer wrap around services to foster housing stability, which may include case management, counseling, behavioral health supports, medical services, and meals; the types of services an individual receives will vary.

Q: What is the difference between these and homeless shelters?

A: Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing provide the safety and stability of a place to call home. Privacy. A door that locks. Their own bed to sleep in every night. A bathroom. A shower that doesn't require signing up for a time slot. Ready access to health and behavioral health treatment and services and a case manager to help navigate community systems. Studies show these elements create a base to begin to rebuild lives. Persons referred to these facilities will also have been screened and assessed to aid in their housing placement, and persons who are referred to housing have often undergone some amount of stabilization whereas persons

¹ This FAQ sheet is a combination of Medina-specific questions and information from King County's Health Through Housing FAQ

entering shelter may be coming directly from an institution like a hospital and will not always have been screened prior to seeking shelter.

General

Q: I've heard about what's happening in Kirkland with King County's purchase of La Quinta Inn. Is this going to happen in Medina?

A: It's helpful to remember that Kirkland is a larger, traditional city with residential, office, commercial, institutions, industrial, and parks zoning districts. To address chronic homelessness on a countywide scale, King County has been identifying potential properties for their Health Through Housing (HTH) program. They have specifically been looking at hotels because the hospitality industry was one of the hardest hit financially from COVID. The hospitality industry still has not rebounded and hotels are for sale at lower-than-normal prices. This has allowed King County to take advantage of the moment to acquire properties both for immediate use and as future development properties. Kirkland's La Quinta Inn is an existing structure that can quickly be renovated to meet the needs of King County's program. There are no existing hotels in Medina, nor can a hotel ever be built here.

Q: How many facilities will Medina be required to have?

A: While the law requires cities to site a sufficient number of permanent supportive housing and transitional housing, we don't know what Medina's number is yet. The Department of Commerce will establish county-wide totals, likely by fall of 2022. It will then be up to the county to assign each city their number.

Q: What will these facilities look like?

A: They are residential facilities, so they will look like a house. The zoning code will restrict the height, size, and setbacks of any facility.

Q: Can we require a 1,000-foot buffer away from schools?

A: It is again helpful to remember that the area of Medina is over four times smaller than Kirkland and over seven times smaller than Bellevue. Imposing a buffer of 1,000-feet severely limits the availability of siting one of these facilities, which would put the city at risk of being noncompliant with the state law. Additionally, the City is unable to be more restrictive with these facilities than with churches. [RCW 36.01.290](#) allows churches to host the homeless. St. Thomas Church is on the same lot as St. Thomas School; therefore, we cannot create a buffer that would be in violation of RCW 36.01.290.

Q: What about sex offenders, the mentally ill, and drug addicted?

A: There are already state requirements for sex offenders living within close proximity to schools. Mental illness and drug addiction are not limited to the homeless. Outside of what's already in the state law, cities are unable to place limitations on the type of individuals that reside in these facilities.

Q: Who would run these facilities?

A: Non-profit organizations

Q: Are you aware of any of these facilities that want to come into the City now?

A: No. The purpose of adopting this code is not only to be in conformance with the new state law, but to be proactive and have something in place in the event one of these facilities does come into the City. Just as adult family homes and family day care homes are permitted in Medina, now too are permanent supportive housing and transitional housing.

Resident Roles and Responsibilities

Q: What are the residents' responsibilities?

A: Each prospective resident receives an individual assessment prior to placement. Each resident must sign a code of conduct agreement, not dissimilar from a lease agreement in that it spells out the rules and obligations for tenancy. Each resident will pay a portion of their income, whether social security, disability, or veterans' benefits. Given that all tenants are very low-income, payment of a portion of their income represents a substantial investment in their housing.

Q: Will there be rules for behavior for residents?

A: Rules will vary by provider, but in general, these sites have a code of conduct that is agreed upon at the time of entry. Residents are required to comply with the terms of the agreement or risk eviction. These cover expectations for things such as rent responsibility, visitors, interpersonal behavior, etc. The rules are balanced with the recognition that people experiencing chronic homelessness will often require support as they transition into housing and adjust to a living situation with rules. The core principle behind housing first is that stable housing creates the foundation that makes it possible to address other needs.

Operations

Q: Is the onsite staffing plan?

A: The facilities will have 24/7 staffing. The actual staffing plan will be dependent upon the service provider but will include onsite case management and access to health and behavioral health treatment and services.

Q: How long can a resident stay?

A: Permanent Supportive Housing facilities have no limit on the length of stay while Transitional Housing facilities are limited to 24-months, however that may be extended if the program is limited to tenants of a specific age range, or the program is intended for tenants in need of time to complete and transition from educational or training services. There will be onsite services, including housing counseling, so that residents who are able and want to move-on to other permanent housing receive the support to do so, opening up their unit for another person to use.

Q: Will residents have restrictions on access to come and go from the facility?

A: These facilities are intended to be their home and they will come and go as anyone would from their own home. Access by non-residents of the facility may be limited or restricted by the operator's guest policy.

Q: What about guests or couch surfing?

A: Residents can invite family and friends to visit their home. There will likely be a guest policy in place however residents cannot invite others to move in. Staff will know who lives there and who does not. Only those who have been assessed and approved for residency will be allowed to live there.

Q: How will you keep residents and businesses safe?

A: Safety of residents and surrounding neighbors is critically important. Living unsheltered and outside is life-threatening, and one of the most important functions of these facilities is to bring at-risk and chronically homeless residents into safer places. To be clear, King County does not subscribe to stereotypes that depict persons experiencing homelessness as dangerous. Do some people who are homeless use or abuse substances? Yes, but so do millions of people across the country who struggle with addiction in the privacy of their own homes. The same is true for people experiencing a mental illness or living with some sort of life trauma. These challenges by no means are restricted only to those who are homeless. For these tenants, the expectation is that residents will abide by the code of conduct and if they can't or won't, they will have to leave.

Q: What will be enforcement strategies from illegal activities in units or the surrounding area?

A: The code of conduct pertains to the individual unit, the shared spaces in the housing project and the immediate vicinity of the housing site. Regarding the surrounding area, the onsite operator will be responsible for ensuring there are no illegal activities in the surrounding premises by residents. Failure to abide by the code of conduct and the rules governing the housing means the resident will lose their apartment. The Good Neighbor Agreement will also likely include some discussion around expectations for the surrounding area.

Q: What services will be provided to residents asked to leave/lose their apartments?

A: Transition services will be provided to any tenant needing a different housing or shelter option. The operator will work with the County to identify an appropriate alternative placement.

Q: Will there be security?

A: All facilities will have 24/7 staffing. Permanent supportive housing buildings elsewhere in the county all have staff awake, alert and on duty around-the-clock.

Q: Will drug and/or alcohol use be permitted in the individual units?

A: Substance use that is legal in anyone's home will be legal in these homes. The onsite agency staff will directly engage anyone exhibiting problem behaviors due to substance use and offer treatment services. The provider will have the goal of preserving housing stability while offering immediate access to treatment and clear direction as to what is and isn't acceptable behavior. However, anyone who is unable to abide by the code of conduct and continuously

disrupts housing for the other residents is at risk of expulsion. If that becomes necessary, case managers would work directly with the tenant to try to find a different housing situation that might be a better fit.

Q: Is this a safe injection site?

A: No. Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing facilities create homes; they are not safe injection sites.

Q: Are there background checks on the tenants in the facilities?

A: It is important to note that the individuals moving in to one of these facilities are all enrolled in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Some will also be enrolled in the Veterans data system. Some will be enrolled in the Behavioral Health information system. They are not strangers to housing and human services. No one walks up and gets assigned a room and there are no walk-ins, ever. The assessment between case manager and prospective tenant will determine the most appropriate location. Any state or local laws, requirements, or restrictions in place for tenants in nearby houses in the same area will pertain to these facilities' residency as well. This would include sex offender registration and any exclusions to tenancy required in law. The goal is for the tenants to be successful in housing and for the housing to fit in the neighborhood.

Q: If the goal is to help people transition into stability, what is the pathway to this goal?

A: Housing stability is defined as not returning to homelessness. Therefore, if individuals move from chronic homelessness into these facilities, the program will have achieved success on that goal. As appropriate or as requested, onsite case managers will work with residents who want to move on to another type of housing once they have achieved improved health and stability. An example might be a person who stabilizes in a HTH hotel (such as what is being proposed in Kirkland) who wants to move to an apartment with a kitchen. As the program name emphasizes, access to healthcare is a key component of a person's overall health and wellness, and we know that people who do not have housing are profoundly challenged in accessing and benefiting from healthcare. This program will house people and then provide onsite and accessible services to help them gain health and stability.

Q: Do you anticipate a high turnover rate?

A: No, because this is creating homes, not shelter. For comparison, during 2020, according to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority System Performance data, 97 percent of households remained in permanent supportive housing.